GB TRANSPORT NETWORKS STILL VULNERABLE TO WINTER WEATHER

The resilience of UK transport infrastructure and services during periods of adverse winter weather has improved, but more must be done to strengthen the sector’s winter preparedness, said the cross party Transport Select Committee in the House of Commons, the parliament’s lower house.

Launching a report on transport preparations for winter weather, Louise Ellman MP, Chair of Transport Committee, said on 2\textsuperscript{nd} January, “Transport is vital to economic growth. A lack of preparedness for winter weather has a direct impact on the movement of people and goods and on the economy as a whole.

“Disruption to transport is not just caused by snow. We saw recently the impact of severe storms and flooding on transport services. At Gatwick, thousands of passengers were stranded over the Christmas period due to a power failure during stormy weather. The Civil Aviation Authority must get to the bottom of what went wrong and how airports across the country can avoid similar situations in the future.

“We recognise that some progress has been made by Government and transport providers to improve public information and passenger welfare during severe weather. In particular, pro-active decision-making by rail and aviation operators to reduce or cancel services ahead of a major event has reduced disruption.

“Nevertheless, we believe there remains considerable scope for further improvement across the transport sector:

It is vital that passengers receive up to date information of changes and disruption whenever possible.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) should set out how it will evaluate the impact of the new airport licence conditions on passenger welfare, by Spring 2015. The CAA must also ensure that best practice on the provision of information and on passenger welfare is shared across all UK airports.

The Highways Agency should review the barriers to providing comprehensive real-time information to drivers; identify technological and other solutions for doing so, particularly during periods of
disruption; and develop a strategy to implement these solutions across the strategic road network.

The Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) should ensure that train operating companies develop more robust procedures to identify how long a period of disruption is likely to last and to communicate this clearly to passengers.

“The availability of salt for gritting roads has improved with the establishment of the strategic salt reserve. However, more should be done to keep pavements clear of ice and snow. A national advertising campaign should highlight that the public can clear snow and ice from outside their homes without fear of legal action and should consider doing so.

“Embedding a culture of continuous review and improvement must remain a priority for Government and transport operators to ensure that all modes and networks are made more robust year after year and that the sector is well placed to address further issues and changing patterns of weather.

“The transport sector must work closely with the Met Office and other forecasters to understand the challenges posed by different types of severe weather. A year or two of mild winter weather should never breed complacency or lead to a false sense of security.”

The Transport Committee Membership is as follows:

Mrs Louise Ellman (Labour/Co-operative, Liverpool Riverside) (Chair);
Sarah Champion (Labour, Rotherham);
Jim Dobbin (Labour/Co-operative, Heywood and Middleton);
Jim Fitzpatrick (Labour, Poplar and Limehouse);
Karen Lumley (Conservative, Redditch);
Jason McCartney (Conservative, Colne Valley);
Karl McCartney (Conservative, Lincoln);
Adrian Sanders (Lib Dem, Torbay);
Chloe Smith (Conservative, Norwich North);
Graham Stringer (Labour, Blackley and Broughton);
Martin Vickers (Conservative, Cleethorpes).